companion. What a challenge it would have been--a new world to explore and enjoy, his lover at his side, a new life to carve from this strange, beautiful and terrible world! But it was an impossible dream, and he set it aside with clear-eyed realism, thinking instead of the choices that actually faced him.

If he remained with Spock, he must accept slavery, put aside forever any hope of freedom. He would have to learn to think, and act, as a slave, submitting his own will and desires to those of his master--or to a succession of masters. It was no use pretending--any romantic notions that Spock might be so in love with him that he would keep the Human as his life companion he dismissed as the wishful thinking it was.

Even in the intimacy of their bed he was still a slave. One night, greatly daring, he had taken advantage of Spock's gentleness to whisper his almost unbearable longing to possess his master. Spock had not been angry, but he had been emphatic--a warrior did not submit to a slave. Spock would willingly use his hands and mouth to give Kirk release, but more than that was unthinkable.

Such a life was natural for Spock, moulded as he was by generations of slave owners, but for Kirk it was impossible. However much he longed to remain with Spock, his fierce independence could not long endure subjugation.

He also faced the knowledge that he would never be able to go home. There was no way back. Ever. His only alternative, if he valued his integrity as a man, if his ideals of freedom and choice were to be preserved, lay in escape. And even that held no promise of safety. Assuming he managed to leave the well-guarded camp without detection, there was an enormous expanse of unknown desert to cross to reach what little concealment the mountains offered a fugitive. Alone, he would be vulnerable prey for the savage le-matyas, or the wild sehlats known to roam the rocky heights. Somehow, he must try to locate one of the bands of escaped slaves and join them...join them in a life as dangerous as that of any hunted creature. And if he were recaptured by any Vulcan...then he would share the fate of the pitiful wretch he had seen butchered during his early days in the camp. But he would be free...and that was the choice a man would make...wasn't it?

As he asked himself the question, Kirk knew the answer, but for the moment he took no action. He rationalized that it would be wiser to learn all that Spock was willing to teach him first. The more he knew, the better equipped he would be to survive. It was, Kirk considered, the practical, sensible decision. He would take his opportunity when it came, and until then he would take what bittersweet pleasure he could.

Kirk applied himself to his training with a new enthusiasm, telling himself that now he was not merely pleasing his master, but actively preparing himself for a life of freedom. There were many lessons to be learned, and not only the skills of the warriors, for Spock insisted that he be taught to read and write Vulcan. His easy understanding of the spoken language had at first puzzled him, but Spock explained that the traders, to facilitate understanding between bewildered, confused slaves and their new masters, implanted in each slave a mechanical device that translated the new language, allowing the slave to understand what was said to him. Speech followed more slowly. The written language, though, had to be learned in the normal fashion, and Spock had persuaded one of Selon's advisors to undertake the task of tutor; it was a complex, difficult language, but Kirk's keen mind took to the lessons with enthusiasm, and he made rapid progress. The texts used served him in another way, for as his understanding grew, he also learned more of the history and customs of his new world. Spock, too, was perfectly willing to discuss such matters with him, treating him more and more as a companion as time passed.

There were still reminders of his slavery, some of which Kirk resented bitterly. Except when they were alone Spock required of him the passive obedience expected of any slave, so that he was often compelled to serve Spock at table, kneeling humbly to present the dishes. Though he ate the same food as his master, and it was brought to the tent so that he did not have to line up for the less appetizing food served to the general slaves, his plate was always filled and handed to him, and though he was granted the unusual concession of being allowed wine, it was always sipped from his master's goblet.

In other ways, his life grew easier. His strict confinement to Spock's tent was eased, and he moved about the camp with growing confidence, learning of the life of the warriors. His wardrobe, which until now had consisted only of the revealing silks of a pleasure slave, was at Spock's command enlarged to include more concealing garments of soft leather, and while these were no doubt practical for a fighting slave, Kirk was also very well aware, and was pleased by the knowledge, that his master was jealous of the admiring glances cast at him. Apart from his tutors, and a few of Spock's closest friends, he was almost totally isolated, for he was not permitted to speak to any of the other slaves unless to relay Spock's orders. More, wherever he went, one of Spock's friends always seemed to be within earshot. He resented this bitterly, seeing it as proof that his master did not trust him, but when one day Satak appeared in time to rescue him from an attempted assault by Savak, he understood it was done for his protection, and was grateful--though it was not considered correct to force a slave without his master's consent, in practice the incident was ignored unless the slave was damaged.

The days flew past for Kirk, until he was startled by Spock's announcement one evening that they would be leaving the camp the next day. The novice warriors had been ordered to return home to fulfill their obligations to their families, and Spock intended to use the journey as a test of how well Kirk had absorbed his own training. Wiser now in the ways of this world, the Human packed what he considered the necessary supplies for the journey across the wastelands to Spock's home, then curled up with a chart to plan the best route to take.

Having made his decision, he submitted his list of supplies and the outline of his chosen route to Spock and was pleased when Spock commended him.

"I leave the journey in your hands, Jim," Spock said. "I would ask you to remember, though, that you are as yet unaccustomed to traveling in the heat of Vulcan. I suggest that you consider